Review of *Vernon Fisher* by Vernon Fisher

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Internationally acclaimed artist Vernon Fisher is known for making paintings that contain complex, and frequently competing, renderings of the world. His carefully crafted art is crowded with stylistically variant depictions of colonial maps, portraits of classic movie stars, and cartoon drawings of Mickey Mouse. The arrangement of such disparate imagery within discrete paintings encourages the viewer of Fisher’s art to make comparisons between the different subjects portrayed. Reconciling the often discordant narrative implications remains an enduring entertainment of Fisher’s work.

A long-time resident of Fort Worth, Texas, the artist creates his paintings by co-opting and manipulating images he considers slightly exotic. This is due, in part, to his upbringing in a small Texas town—which Fisher describes as an experience that was transcribed by what one could see, or what one could find in an
encyclopedia. Not surprisingly, his art, documented in this handsome monograph, reveals the artist's thematic fixation on Texas vistas and 1950s photographs culled from World Book Encyclopedias.

At the beginning of his time in college, Fisher studied math, then literature. Yet he quickly gravitated toward the visual arts. Settling upon the discipline of painting, he retained a literary approach and eventually focused his art on the experiential differences between the written word and the visual image. This lifelong interest is clearly evident in Fisher's hilarious painting When You Lose Your Mind, which narrates the feeling of mental failure as being akin to the experience of living next to crass and rude neighbors. As with much of Fisher's paintings, a brief description is stenciled upon the surface of the canvas:

When you lose your mind it is not the same as when you misplace something. . . . Neural pathways are altered, new paths worn in the grass by neighbors who don't keep up their lawns, who park their beat-up econoline in the front yard and piss in the street . . . They party day and night with their biker friends, blast Megadeath non-stop from the stereo and laugh at your complaints. Chill out, Dude, they say. Everyone is Dude or man . . . you feel like murdering them, but you are helpless. You wonder: who are these people? Where did they come from.

These comical musings are written over a blurred orange rendering of what appears to be a carnival. Other images floating upon the surface include a mushroom cloud detonation of a hydrogen bomb and a cartoon stylization of a character caught in the moment before he tumbles to the ground. Failure and impending doom are the lasting impressions left by this disjunctive pairing of story and pictures.

In the final analysis, Vernon Fisher's protean thirty-year engagement with the ambiguity of words and the flexible meaning of images exemplifies how the limits of all language force us back upon life's absurdities and sometimes toward a gallows humor.

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